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HOSPITALITY SUITE A

CROWN COLISEUM

FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

MONDAY, JUNE 14, 2004 - 1:00 P.M.

IN ATTENDANCE:

BILL HAWKS

UNDER SECRETARY, MARKETING & REGULATORY PROGRAMS

DR. VALERIE RAGAN, ASSISTANT DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR

DR. ROSEMARY SIFFORD

MR. NOLAN LEMON

MR. LEMON: Okay. Let's start with Eric Gonder, please. Please identify yourself.

DR. GONDER: My name is Eric Gonder. I'm here representing the National Turkey Federation, the North Carolina Poultry Federation, and Goldsboro Milling Company, so you're gonna get the triple whammy. They did provide me with prepared remarks. I'm gonna be abridging those while I talk. I can leave copies behind with y'all. I appreciate the opportunity to be here.

They told me to provide you with some background. Individually, I'm a practicing poultry veterinarian with about 30 years of experience. I'm the senior staff veterinarian at Goldsboro Milling Company in North Carolina. North Carolina has got a large stake in animal agriculture as a whole. Anything to do with animal identification, we're quite interested in it. It's a vital part of our economy. Poultry growers in North Carolina produce about 46 million turkeys annually. We're number four in chicken production, about 700 million broilers.

The National Turkey Federation, in particular, represents virtually the entire turkey industry in the United States, producing something in excess of 270 million head per year. The North Carolina Poultry Federation represents the turkey industry as well as the broiler and egg industries in the state with about 4,000 producers. Twenty-five thousand North Carolinians directly employed in poultry production and marketing.

Our rural economy is heavily dependent on a healthy poultry industry. The North Carolina Poultry Federation works closely with all segments of the industry to try and

maintain.

The company that I work for, Goldsboro Milling Company, plays a significant role in the state's livestock and poultry industry. It's the sixth largest privately held company in North Carolina. We produce 9 million turkeys and 1.6 million hogs annually, manage about 1200 brutexx cattle. We provide hatching eggs and day-old colts through the eastern United States and to a limited extent internationally. Goldsboro Milling is one of the owners of Carolina Turkeys, the nation's fifth largest turkey processor, with about 580 million pounds live weight processed this last year.

At Goldsboro Milling, I'm responsible for hatchery and breeder quality assurance, salmonella reduction, poultry and egg customer technical support, field investigations, technical support to the hog and cattle divisions, as well as Carolina Turkeys.

NTF and the Poultry Federation would like to commend you as to your work in the last couple of years developing a national identification program. We've tried to participate in that actively.

International trade has become increasingly important to our industry as exports now consume about eight percent of all turkey produced in the U.S. At Carolina Turkeys, it's much larger than that. We export some 20 percent of that 580 million pounds. These markets are extremely sensitive to animal disease breaks, and it's imperative that we have ways to reassure our trading partners that we can identify and control these breaks.

In 2004 alone, we've had 60 countries impose partial or total bans on the import of U.S. poultry products, primarily because of isolated avian influenza breaks in the

country. At one point earlier this year, the combined poultry industries in the U.S. were losing approximately $20 million per week to the embargoes.

Dr. Ragan went over hazards from bio-terrorism, so I won't really address that. The groups that I represent do want to make a distinction between supporting the process of animal identification and endorsing the specifics of the program. The Poultry Industry Task Force on Animal Identification has not completed its work, so USDA is not proposing, as we understand it, nor could we endorse, a specific animal identification program for poultry.

We believe an identification should be done by flock rather on an individual basis, both for poultry and, in our case, for hogs as well. We produce them under a vertically-integrated system, retaining ownership of the animals. We can identify them quite adequately by group and maintain them integral to those groups.

We believe the program should be extended to the live bird markets operating in and around major urban areas that were implicated in the outbreaks of Low Path AI in Virginia in 2002, the Low Path outbreak in the northeast this year, and the single case of High Path flu in Texas earlier this year. I'll work with you to determine what sort of identification program will be suitable for those markets, but it needs to be by group or individually.

We applaud the decision to use currently available ID systems. We think that's going to be particularly applicable for the vertically integrated poultry/hog industries. We have to maintain identification of those groups for inventory control purposes now. The procedures are all in place. We can track the animals within the companies quite

adequately in somewhat less than 48 hours.

Movement of the flocks and herds on hogs is tightly controlled. We do have the records in a centralized location. It's a business-based capability. North Carolina has a very good system in house. I hope that you can evaluate that closely. It started out with the pseudorabies eradication effort. We used it on an independent basis in the turkey industry to control turkey coronoviral enteritis starting in about 1997. We utilized it again in cooperation with the state to control MG outbreaks in 1999. We used it most recently to curtail the spread of Low Path avian influenza on--that occurred at approximately the same time in Virginia that truncated to North Carolina to, if I remember correctly, some four flocks. We were in and out of the problem on a relatively short basis.

It's a good program and it's worked well for us. The state's put a good number of resources into it, and it's had good utility for us on a statewide basis. The trade groups and the mill do believe that identification programs should be voluntary, confidential, and focused primarily on animal disease as opposed to marketing efforts. We hope that we can utilize our current systems.

We've got a lot invested in computer programming, our own in-house numbering systems. We can share that information quite successfully with the state. We have in the past and we hope we can maintain that. It's been a very efficient system that's been capable of rapid response, which, with most of the diseases that we've dealt with in poultry and, to some extent, in hogs, we've been much more concerned with the diseases that spread quickly rather than those that spread over a long period of time.

The three minutes about up?

MR. LEMON: Yes.

DR. GONDER: Thank you.

MR. HAWKS: Thank you.

MR. LEMON: Okay. David Ridlin.

MR. RIDLIN: I want to introduce myself. First off, it's a pleasure meeting both of you. I visited Valerie, I think, once on the phone. She was going through United or Delta, I believe, at the time.

DR. RAGAN: Probably.

MR. RIDLIN: Mad. My name is David Ridlin and I am the president of GlobalTrac. We are what we feel the premier Animal ID system.

DR. RAGAN: I remember talking to you.

MR. RIDLIN: Yeah, you remember talking to me. We've recently just--I wanted to update you real quick. Recently just concluded a complete pasture to plate trial, which included USDA at Clay Center Meat and Animal Research. Mohammed Kumaru was the supervising Ph.D. there. We utilized Swift, Standard Meat, Outback Steakhouse. Basically what we did is, we took our tracking system, went to Clay Center, Nebraska, inserted the bolus, which we utilize a ruman bolus, and we can go into that at another time. And we basically--ruman bolus allows for zero dilution through the system. We have 100 percent retention. They don't fall out of the ears. There's a lot of GPS technologies that we've built into our ruman bolus in lieu of premise ID's, we can give you exact lat and longs of that animal, some really neat things that are incorporated

into that.

But we inserted our bolus in the cattle at Clay Center, Nebraska. They were slaughtered at Swift. We--once the head and hide were removed, we identified every animal 100 percent. Prior to evisceration, the sub-primals were cut, sent to Standard Meat for aging. They were identified again at Standard Meat in Fort Worth.

From that point, they were cut into individual steaks and sent to Outback Steakhouse then returned back to Standard Meat, re-numbered, and returned to our DNA lab. We identified every steak 100 percent from the time it was--we could take a T-bone steak and tell you it came out of red cow number 387 at Clay Center, Nebraska. Not 98.5 percent; 100 percent. I have that documentation and the DNA test if you'd like that. Valerie, I can give you our web page and a user code to go to and read. Extremely impressive. Mohammed Kumaru was extremely impressed with our protocol to extract DNA from meat samples, which is part of our sampling process.

What we would like to see come out of a National Animal ID System is, we don't want us to go out there and do the quick and easy thing for a rancher and stick an ear tag in this ear and that be the end of it. We feel like if you're gonna design a system and we're gonna start to implement a system for National Animal ID, let's implement a system that has the technology and the ability to continue on down that retail chain to the end consumer. We can't do that with an ear tag, because once that animal's head's cut off at the slaughter plant, it's over.

A system that can track them DNA-wise, not only can we trace back from a consumer's plate back to the pasture, but we can also pre-screen for a lot of hormonal

abuse, antibiotic abuse, bio-terrorism issues, and hopefully in the near future, rapid-scan BSE through blood. We think that that's what we need to be looking at. We've already done our test for the USDA with the impressive results. We would like to be part of your protocol test, whatever, you know, you guys want to do.

The premise ID issue, some of the issues that we have is the premise ID. We think that the lat-long would be uniform in the industry, uniform in the world. I understand your privacy issue. If I say it's a lat-long of this, this, this, you could walk right up to the rancher's house. Somehow that can be converted, but we think that the lat-long needs to be a real big consideration in premise ID. We can utilize that anywhere.

What's more important to us than the premise ID scenario is, I have seven ranches in three states. If I give you my premise ID in Rowan County, and that cow that's sick is in Iowa, there could be confusion there. We could have cattle that you think came from my pasture in Rowan County, and he actually came from Iowa. And if it's not confusion, it could be an attempt to hide on a rancher's part, because if he did come up with BSE, God forbid, and he says, "Well, my premise ID is Rowan County," and you come and test all my animals in Rowan County when the true problem lays in Iowa. That's where we feel lat-long is a far superior facility.

With our technology utilizing the ruman bolus, every time the animal is worked, every time the animal is loaded on a truck, every time the animal is run through a sell barn or slaughter or the meat goes past, it all is tagged back GPS-wise to a lat-long, every time. I know what pasture he's in. I know you got him in this county. I know you put him in your truck. That's some of the stuff that we would like to show you how our

system works.

But we do applaud you for coming out. This is probably gonna be the friendliest crowd that you face the whole time you're out, so. But---

MR. HAWKS: I did the Country of Origin listening sessions, so I understand.

MR. RIDLIN: Well, you know, eventually the Country of Origin deal is gonna rear its ugly head again, and I think that the Country of Origin labeling is, as a marketing standpoint, I think it's a good thing, if utilized properly. The economic downsides of that, of trying to label every box of meat, that that steak came from this cow, is impossible, unless you use a system like ours that DNA-maps every animal that's slaughtered, every animal. Thank you.

MR. LEMON: Chester Lowder.

MR. LOWDER: Chester Lowder from North Carolina Farm Bureau. On behalf of the North Carolina Farm Bureau, I am pleased to offer these comments, and we would like to thank Under Secretary Hawks and USDA staff for conducting this listening session here in Fayetteville today. As the largest general farm organization in North Carolina, we represent diversified farm families from all 100 counties in our state. Many of our members depend on livestock for their livelihoods.

North Carolina Farm Bureau supports an economical livestock identification system in the U.S. to track animals for disease and health concerns. However, we are concerned about confidentiality of the program's information, mandatory or voluntary plans, implementation process, compliance cost, increased farm liability, and traceability.

Mr. Under Secretary, North Carolina has every species of livestock this proposed statute would cover, from bison and beef cattle to turkeys and Tilapia. In 1964, livestock and poultry accounted for 30 percent of the state's agricultural cash receipts. Currently, more than 60 percent of those cash receipts are the result of our multi-billion dollar livestock and poultry industries. Today, relatively new sectors of our livestock industry, such as dairy and meat goats and aquaculture, are providing our farmers with additional opportunities.

North Carolina farmers realize the need for an effective voluntary animal identification program; however, our producers are concerned about the cost of the animal identification program and how much of the program cost they would be forced to bear. Individual producers have no way of passing on the cost to the consumer, who ultimately benefits the most. Therefore, establishing the National Identification Program could affect our farmers' ability to sustain their operation and make a profit. Because of the size of our state's livestock industry, North Carolina's economy could be negatively impacted.

Farm Bureau is concerned about the confidentiality of the program's information. Success of the program will depend on producers' belief that the information collected will remain confidential. Farmers will be more likely to embrace a system that uses information for the purposes for which it was gathered, tracking diseases and residue problems.

Maintaining the confidentiality of animal identification information is important for the protection of all involved in the production of livestock. The federal government

must safeguard, possibly under Homeland Security or US Department of Agriculture, who has access to program files and information. Any information obtained by this program should be accessible to the animal industry and appropriate public agencies for the purpose of planning, organization, and response to any disease outbreaks or acts of terrorism.

We are also concerned as to whether the program will be voluntary or mandatory. We strongly believe that a voluntary system that is implemented on an incremental basis will be less disruptive to livestock production.

Farm Bureau supports an economical livestock identification system that will provide for traceability, but please remember that we are breaking new ground on this issue. In the event of a disease outbreak, a 48-hour trace back will allow USDA and state agencies to quickly isolate and minimize the impact. It is common for ownership of some types of livestock to change hands several times during the life of the animal. In fact, some livestock even crosses national borders. With a system of multiple owners, any unauthorized residue found in an animal's tissue could be wrongly matched with an honest, hard-working producer. This reality demonstrates the importance of traceability in determining the correct source of the disease problems.

North Carolina producers are deeply concerned over liability issues relating to a disease outbreak. Once an identification system is in place, it is very possible that a problem could be linked to an individual producer, when, in fact, the animals could have contracted the problem after leaving the care of that producer, unfairly implicating a producer without having all of the facts could affect the producer's ability to sustain his

operation. Therefore, the identification system should include safeguards that prevent the release of information until a thorough and complete investigation is conducted.

A national identification system must be flexible to allow for regional differences and enable producers to generate added information that will assist them in their operations. Such a system must also be flexible in incorporating existing identification systems, such as the national scrapie program for sheep.

We believe that producers must be able to receive benefit from the identification system. An animal identification system could provide added value for large-scale producers and integrators who may develop new marketing strategies under such a system.

While we have many large livestock and poultry operations in North Carolina, we also have many small farms that operate at significantly lower numbers. The Animal Identification Program must not be so onerous that these small owners are forced out. There must be a way to capture the cost from the market without putting farmers out of business. One way to reduce the impact would be a stipulation that animals don't have to be tagged until they reach the point of sale or they leave the farm.

The North Carolina Farm Bureau, again, supports a voluntary plan that provides for confidentiality, recognizes regional differences and existing identification systems, and accomplishes all of this in a cost-effective manner.

In closing, on behalf of the North Carolina Farm Bureau and our president, Larry Wooten, I would like to thank the Under Secretary for being here today and staff for conducting this session. And we request that as debate moves forward, we currently

welcome any future opportunity to make comments. Thank you.

MR. LEMON: Michael Siemens.

DR. SIEMENS: Under Secretary Hawks, Dr. Ragan, my name is Dr. Michael Siemens. I work for a company called Smithfield Foods, Smithfield Packing. I'm sure that it will be brought out the tediousness of this on the live animal side and kind of the question I have more relates back to the packing side.

We've talked a lot today about what may be required on the live animal side. I guess what I'm looking at is, if I can ask the question, what your expectations may be on the plant side in terms of data collection and data sharing. You know, obviously we're very integrated here on the East Coast with the Smithfield companies, the 13 plants we have both on the beef and the pork side. As we move to the west, we become less integrated.

We realize some of the pressures we may have here, but at least if I could get some feedback possibly about when an animal does come to market, at least from the plant side, the slaughter side, what you might expect back in terms of data identification, sharing, collection, from our standpoint. Thank you.

MR. HAWKS: This is your chance, again, and Valerie and I probably ought to take a few minutes to just sort of--well, we'll wing it, because I was going to try to respond to some of those, and Valerie's going to fill in, because I think, you know, as I expected, I heard some common themes here.

Obviously, confidentiality, you know, Chester, the cost, those sort of things that--we are committed to trying to protect that confidentiality. We're committed to make sure

that the cost is not such that it would put your producers out of business with respect to the question. And Valerie's taking notes to make sure that I do this, and then I'm gonna give her the podium, because she was taking notes as well.

As far--with respect to Smithfield, what is expected of you from the packing industry really, you know, all we're concerned about this right now is we want to know when that animal is slaughtered and we want to know the date. That's really all that we're looking for, as I said over and over, from our perspective we're talking about a disease control and management system. That's the driving force for what we're doing here. So that's really what we're looking for in the animal identification program. So that's really what we're looking for from you.

Valerie, do you want to--maybe you can go through that with respect to flocks and groups of animals. That's obviously something that we're certainly looking at. As we said, every species is not going to be the same. We've looked at even the technology may be different for the tracking there, so I think it's just pretty obvious that we're--we're hearing what you said. You know, with respect to the boluses and technology, wonderful technology. There is no question about that. But we think those are the things that will be evolving. So, Valerie, if you want to take a shot at it.

DR. RAGAN: Just a few points. I tried to take a lot of notes here so we can keep this--and of course we'll have the record from the lady that's breathing the oxygen, which I might borrow that sometime. A couple of things. I appreciate the comments. They were good. They were helpful. One thing--and I wrote down a few things that I forgot to stick in here that I'm gonna stick in for the next one. But one of

those is the group/lot concept.

We talked about individual ID and tracking individual animals. There is also, built into the plan, the allowance for group and lot identification, and there are some specific requirements on when that can be used, including recordkeeping, as was discussed earlier, especially in the swine and poultry industry. So we're right on board with you there. They have--a lot of them have good records on the premises. On animals that are born, raised, and move as a group or a lot, there is the ability to use a group or lot number in there, and certainly the swine and poultry industries are the most likely place for that to be used. So I'm gonna add that in to the next time I talk, so we'll make sure I get that.

A couple of other comments that I'd like to make is that first of all, there's--the discussion on mandatory versus voluntary, I want to make also the point that if sections of this do move into a mandatory phase that that will be a regular rule making process that will go out for public comment. We won't sneak it in the back door. So if there is a decision made down the road that parts of this need to be mandatory, then that will go through the normal rule making process with the announcement of it and what the potential rule is, the opportunity for comment, et cetera, so I want to make that real clear too.

As far as the different premises numbers, and it's hard when you're trying to give an overview and not get into too much detail, you always miss something that's important. But the premises numbering system, the comment was made about the seven premises in the different states and accidentally getting to the wrong premises, and that's

a very valid comment and concern.

The way the premises numbering systems are designed are that if a producer has, for example, seven premises, the idea behind whether you have one number or seven numbers is really intended to be based on, "What do we need to do if there's a disease outbreak?" Now, if there are premises in different states, then they would need different numbers that would be going into the state system so that the state animal health official in each of those states would have a record. So we wouldn't--under the way that the premises numbers would be allocated, we wouldn't be looking at one state for an animal when it's truly in another.

That being said, we could have the possibility of having multiple premises in one state. The idea is to try and keep this as simple, yet workable, as possible. So when decisions would be made on, "Do you need multiple numbers or could one number cover it?" would depend on how management and operation works.

We have guidelines on how premises numbers would be assigned, and there is intended to be a location where the animals are. But if an owner or producer has several premises and all the animals move around all of those premises within the same state, then there could be one number assigned to that producer, because the concept, again, the mindset, the thought process is, what would we do if we had an outbreak and we needed to trace an animal back to one of those premises? Well, if the animals are commingling and moving around to all of those premises, they're essentially considered one herd for disease-tracking or epidemiological purposes. So it could have one premises number. In the record would be a description of all the premises locations where--the other premises

that would also be there, so we would know to go to all seven if we had a disease outbreak.

On the other hand--and I'm talking general terms here. This is the concept of how this would be applied. On the other hand, if there are multiple premises that are managed differently, say, commercial operators and purebred operators, for example, that manage the animals completely separately and have different management systems, then they might want several numbers because they're individual operations, essentially.

So if we had an outbreak situation or a disease traced back to one, say, the commercial herd, we wouldn't need to bother the purebred herd. They're managed differently. There's no commingling, et cetera. That decision is left up to the state on how--how many numbers and how they're gonna be assigned.

So the state animal health official, with those situations--and there are a thousand scenarios that have been discussed during the development of this system on, "How is the best way to do this?" And our determination is, at least initially--and as we move forward we may modify this as we learn from it, but we provide the guidelines based on what we would do if there is a disease outbreak. A state animal health official could then talk with the producer and determine what is the best way to do it for disease purposes and also for the producer's purposes.

A couple of other things. I wanted to just say quickly, one is the liability concern is one that's been brought up a number of times. One of the reasons we've built the system to have all the steps in there and the dates and times is so that we can more accurately go back to where we need to go for disease tracking purposes.

One of the concerns from the early discussions was, "Well, should we just start by having a location where the animals are born and raised, an initial originating premises and a slaughter and build in the middle?" What happens then is, anything collected at slaughter goes right back to the producer. So we wanted to build this system so that we had each intermediate step along the way. So then we can go back and look at the incubation period or whatever it is we're concerned with, and we would be able to determine, if we had dates and times, for something that's a short incubation period on a 10-year-old cow, the producer of that 10-year-old cow has nothing to do with whatever occurred in there.

The other side of the story, however, is if there are true--an occurrence of something that really does need to get tracked back to where the problem is, either the producer isn't aware that there is a problem of concern that needs to be aware so that that can be corrected, or there is a criminal action. Then the producer groups that we've talked to and have included in a lot of these discussions say, "We want to be able to trace those animals back. If I've got a true problem that's on my farm, I want to know about it."

On the other hand, if somebody is doing something criminally, that affects us all. We need to know about that too. So there's a balance between the liability and trying to get to the correct place. The liability is still there. I mean, it's there today. It's just a matter of getting to the right place as best you can.

One other--two other points I wanted to make. One is on the location for tagging. A comment was made about, "Let's not put people out of business," and that's been front

and center on these discussions. We very definitely do not want to put people out of business. So if--some of the options that are being discussed is, where would those animals be tagged if they're tagged or whatever technology--obviously there are excellent technologies out there that can be used at different phases.

Again, we want to keep it as economically feasible as possible, so if people can do the DNA part and all the stuff David was talking about that's phenomenal technology, that we can include that in our system and have it work. On the other hand, if there is a producer that's got five cows and doesn't want to have to deal with all of that, then we've got a system that works for him too.

The same discussion is that where--if there is a very, very small producer, they're not gonna want to buy whatever equipment or deal with whatever technology the industry decides to use, there is a lot of discussion going on on setting up either tagging locations, tagging--I'm blanking on the word here, but essentially a tagging location where they get the animals tagged, or the markets will try to help that as well.

There is a--and the last thing I want to make is that there is a Market Processor Working Group that's dealing with the market issues as well, including where--for the small producer, where is the most logical place to have that animal identified and to have that report conducted? And, in addition, there is also the processor group who is looking at what--what's the best way for processors to deal with this from here. They're also on the working group.

The main thing, as Mr. Hawks said, is--at this point, collect the information, the Animal ID number, and the date that the animal was slaughtered. So we've got these

groups at the table to try to answer some of them, the best ways to implement this.

MR. HAWKS: I think we had--okay. We've got a little more time, so we're going to take a few--Barry?

MR. PITTMAN: After listening to all these discussions, I think I'd be remiss not to come up and say something anyway.

But my name is Barry Pittman. I represent the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. I am the director of emergency programs, and I have been to Goldsboro Mills. I'd like to commend them on their forward thinking on some of the things they've done in their industry. It is a vertical integration. They have cattle. They have swine. They have poultry. They have catfish. So it's a great--a great model for us to look at closely.

I want to reiterate some of the things that Mr. Lowder said, but the bottom line here is, we own the database for the State of North Carolina right now. We're unique in the fact that we're swine and poultry heavy on our ID premises right now and not cattle. We need to get strong on cattle and we're looking forward to working with USDA on methods to do that, and to propose some methods for that shortly when these cooperative agreements come out tomorrow.

Also, our cattle industry--and Mr. Lowder can tell me if I'm wrong on this--but consists mostly of smaller owners, 50 head or less, so we don't have the big industry you have in Kansas and other states.

We want to take this approach to look at it from North Carolina's perspective, but also the ability to apply it to all the other states in the union. With the technology we

own now, we feel that we have the capability to maintain our database, and if you need information, we can provide that to USDA when they ask for it without giving them complete blanket data on premise ID.

So I guess what I'm saying is, we now have a system where we can get the premise ID number for swine and poultry facilities to include number of houses. We've got a complete information database on that. We have proprietary rights on that. We've done the legislation and the statutes are in place to protect that. We feel we can continue to protect that and still provide USDA with a unique number for national ID. They simply need to ask us what that number--give us that number, and we can go back and we can do the complete trace and give them the information they want without others having access to it. The others would have access to a unique number. That number would mean nothing to them, but everything to us in the State of North Carolina. So that's where we're moving, and that's where our thoughts are going.

Criminal activities, we do have provisions in ours to assist SBI and FBI with database information, so we have those ties. We have great ties with the industry right now, and we want to keep them that way, and we feel the way to do that is to make sure that they know that it's proprietary information and will stay that way.

We need to move forward for cattle, goats, sheep, and some of the smaller animals, and horses too. And we are looking at methods to do that right now. So I guess, bottom line, is we know that there's GIS technology out there to be able to actually produce schematics on travel, and using that bolus system would do that. We could actually draw a schematic where--everywhere an animal moved by GPS. This system has

to rely heavily on GPS. We have to have the lat/longs to go with this system. Without that, we can't do anything with it.

We based our entire response systems in North Carolina on two diseases, BSE, because it's prion driven, and we do everything we--we--all our technology that we look at to eliminate disease is through the prion because it's the most difficult to eliminate. We look at FMD as the other disease for the spreadability and the multiple species factors that's involved in that. So everything we're looking at, database-wise, Animal ID, and everything else, is based on those two diseases, the defeat of the prion, to kill it and eliminate it, and to prevent the spread, and that's where GPS is essential for us. We have to know where the locations, where all these places are.

Our concerns are, if you know the locations of those places and it's Freedom of Information and someone gets that information, then the press will probably beat us to those premises, and that's not gonna work for us. We need to be able to be first on those premises and initiate what we have. And I think what we have can be reproduced throughout the states, all 50 states. Thank you.

MR. HAWKS: Okay. I think--one thing that I need to reiterate. I think I said it about seven, eight times, but I'm gonna say it one more time. The confidentiality of the data is of utmost importance to us, and we have every intention to protect that data, period.

We are actually--and I think--I did learn something. What I'm not going to do is, the rest of the sessions--we are learning here. But I'm going to ask you, you know, from now, the ones that would be at--we're gonna have people to sign up so that we can make

sure we do that. But we're going to deviate, and I saw one more hand back here somewhere. Yeah. Oh, you've already had your chance.

MR. RIDLING: I just have a question.

MR. HAWKS: Okay. Well, we will be happy to address that out here later, but I think our--well, come on. If I'm already deviating, go ahead and ask your question.

MR. RIDLING: Valerie, really quick question. If we source-verify our cattle using an ear tag, and that ear tag falls out, that animal is now technically non-source verified. What are we gonna do, as cattlemen?

MR. HAWKS: I think--let's not respond to that. I think--because--I think what we're getting into here is we're getting into the types of technology. We're getting into specifics, and I--you know, we take that with certainly your comment will be recorded, but I'd rather--that's technology. We have been very consistent to say that we want to be technology neutral. We don't want to have a system such that, you know, that some people can comply with, some people can't comply with, or that it would cost them more to comply with.

So these are some of the things that we would be looking at, at our cooperative agreements that we will be doing as we move forward. So, you know, we don't have all the answers. That's the reason we're out here. We want to hear what your concerns are, and as we move forward in building this system we can certainly take those issues and incorporate them into the decision-making process, to move forward. So with that, I would like to say thank you very much to all of you all for being here. I'd have to say

that North Carolina is obviously a leader in emergency preparedness, and the things that you've done, so I would be remiss if I didn't recognize that.

But I think what I might do is, all of the employees of USDA, would you stand? And I want to--come on. Valerie, you are. These are the people that get the work done. I'm the one that has the little office in Washington, but these are the people that I want you to look at and recognize, because they're the ones that are out here doing the work. So I just want to recognize them and say thank you to our hardworking employees of USDA, so thank you. All right.

If we have representatives of the state Department of Agriculture here, would you all stand up? I want to see. And these are the people that get the work done here in North Carolina as well. So thank you all. I did want to recognize you and thank you for coming, thank you for your participation, because this is--this is so very important.

Extension. We have extension personnel here too. Would our extension personnel from North Carolina please stand up? All right. Oh, look. You all have got the biggest group here. Thank you. So you're out there where it really touches the people in every county. And I will have to say that what I--the terminology I've used before of where we are in this process, we have the skeleton, you know, now it's time for us to put the meat on these bones, and you're going to help us do that. Okay. So, with that, I'll say thank you.